

The Potential of Power Naps

A short nap during work is one of the most used productivity tools.

A short nap during work, generally taken when you feel drained and groggy, is one of the most used productivity tools.

Everyone goes through that afternoon slump. The repeated yawns, irritability at the world and the yearning to close your eyes, just for one second. A power nap is one of the commonest ways to beat this drop in energy during the second half of the day.

In a report by Fitbit, Indians have ranked as the second most sleep deprived country, with only Japan getting lesser sleep than us. A nation-wide sleep survey, revealed that 80 percent of people across the country felt sleepy at work between one and three days a week.



So, what exactly is the science behind napping? You may have heard of numerous benefits attributed to this habit as well have as a few apprehensions.

How can power naps benefit us?

In this article, let's understand how power napping works and take a look at how you can be more productive...by napping!

First, what is a power nap?

A power nap is a short period of rest where you do not go past the first of 2 or 3 stages of sleep. Various durations have been experimented with, producing different results, but a 20 to 30 mins nap is best for an energy boost and increased alertness.



How does it work?

Napping in general benefits heart functioning, hormonal maintenance, and cell repair. A power nap, simply maximizes these benefits by getting the sleeper into and out of rejuvenating sleep as fast as possible. When you wake up after a power nap, your neurons perform the same function as before, but now faster and with more accuracy.

What are the benefits of power naps?

Studies show that taking a power nap can help reduce anxiety, make you more alert, and boost cognitive functioning.

In a recent study from 2022, researchers Pedro Bessone and Frank Schilbach found that after more than three weeks of daily 30-minute naps, employees at a data-entry job in Chennai were 2.3% more productive and invested more of their money into savings accounts.

And in another study, power naps improved mood & decreasing depression in college students studying in Varanasi.

Other benefits include

- Boosted capacity for memory and learning
- Improved accuracy
- Improved reasoning and problem-solving skills
- Increased physical performance
- Reduced fatigue and increased alertness

Do power naps really help in high intensity jobs?

NASA scientists, in a study, have found that power naps were able to boost their pilots' performance by 34% and improve alertness by up to 54%. NASA's research showed that naps really can fully restore cognitive function at the same rate as a full night's sleep.

Air traffic controllers monitor and direct the air traffic, an extremely high stress job with workers responsible for the movement and direction of thousands of lives on board flights. They are required to be alert and ready to work at all hours of their shift.

In 2006, an accident occurred in which an airplane crashed while taking off from a runway that was too short in Lexington, Kentucky, US. Forty-nine of the 50 people on board were killed. The air traffic controller who cleared the plane for takeoff didn't notice it turn onto the wrong runway. The controller had worked all night and had had only two hours sleep in the previous 24 hours.

In such jobs where even a momentary drop in attention can result in disastrous consequences, mental fatigue becomes very difficult to shake off once it sets in.

Even in such crucial posts, power naps have in fact proven to be so beneficial to evade this fatigue that air traffic controller manuals recommend that employees take a nap before a shift, even if it be only for 10 minutes.

Can power naps play a role in healthcare?

Sleep deprivation in healthcare workers is a major problem that affects residents and interns in our hospitals. In fact, a study showed that surgical residents were 20% more likely to make errors and 14% slower in a simulation laparoscopic surgery when sleep deprived than after a full night's sleep.

Sleep deprivation also causes a lot of issues including cognitive slowing, slow problem-solving skills, decrease in learning and impaired memory. In fact, many researchers have stated that severe sleep deprivation is similar to being under the influence of ethanol.

Power naps are one of the most effective tools to combat mental and physical fatigue due to long shift hours. Although certain situations may not be amenable to power naps (for example when there is no one to cover for you), use of this tool is workable in almost all other cases. Power napping before a shift has been proven to reduce sleepiness and improve efficiency.



Health workers like doctors, nurses, technicians in 12 to 16 hour shifts often face sleep disturbances, headaches and mood swings due to the disruption of their body's circadian rhythm (internal clock). Adaptation to shift work requires retraining this internal clock to adjust to working hours. To ensure productivity and alertness throughout, we should encourage workers to take power naps before they begin the shift.

How to power nap?

Everyone has the ability to power nap. But the conditions need to be right.

Too often, people sleep for over 30 mins and wake up still feeling exhausted. The key to a perfect nap is to keep it short – within 30 mins.

It is also imperative to set a time of day to nap. Timing is crucial and the best time to take a power nap during the day

is sometime after lunch and before 3 pm. Don't leave it too late as circadian rhythms make late afternoons a more likely time to fall into deep (slow-wave) sleep, which will leave you groggy.

Reduce distractions. Shut your laptop, close the curtains, turn your phone on silent. Go into 'do not disturb' mode so that you don't wake up in an untimely manner.

The ideal sleep posture is to be slightly upright to avoid deep sleep.

After a nap, it takes a little while for your body to get back into gear. So, allow yourself a few minutes to wake up, recover and re-center.

Always keep in mind that the human body needs a certain amount of sleep (at least 7 hours) to allow for the requisite amount of REM cycles for proper functioning. Power naps are only a healthier alternative to the other ways we try to curb our sleepiness viz. caffeine, Redbull etc. during work hours.

And finally, consistency is key to forming a habit of power napping and making it a part of your routine. Power nap every day to build momentum and bring positive changes!

Pro tip: Coffee nap

Having a coffee before you nap allows you to wake up more alert as the caffeine kicks in around 20 mins.



Hesitant, still?

One of the common myths about power naps is that they adversely affect sleep at night. However, studies have failed to show a decrease in night sleep caused by power naps.

People may also scorn napping because they see it as an indication of lethargy or laziness. But little do they know that a few winks during the day and you're on the path to a less turbulent life!

Future of power naps

Are we ready to embrace the value of well-deserved naps at work?

A growing number of companies are embracing the benefits of napping at work. Some businesses have made it a point to offer their employees places to get some rest. A few Indian start-ups have adopted this compelling trend too, much like their

western counterparts.

These places can take the form of a nap room with comfortable beds or couches, but some companies – including tech companies and traditional employers like law firms, have chosen to use nap pods to encourage their employees to take power naps.



Newer technology to improve the napping experience too have been developed – be it the Metronaps nap pod used at Google or sleep trackers that analyze sleep rhythms or the latest ‘Da Vinci rooms’ which are a combination of architecture and neuroscience designed to create an environment that promotes sleep. These innovations are in response to the increased demand for quality sleep and uptick in awareness about the effectiveness of power naps.

Take away

We have all heard of the Spanish siesta. Even at home,

Punekars are known for their afternoon naps (पूनाई). Science has finally caught up to these age-old customs that have been almost forgotten in our modern world. We now realize that power naps are hugely beneficial to our efficiency and help us maintain accuracy over an extended period of time. And in jobs like ours, where lapses in concentration can have far-reaching consequences, they are of paramount importance.

Now that you know the potential of a power nap, get cosy and catch a few z's the next time you feel an afternoon slump coming and see it work wonders!

Featured Image Source:

1. By WavebreakMediaMicro on Adobe Stock

References:

1. Bessone, P., Rao, G., Schilbach, F., Schofield, H., & Toma, M. (2021). The Economic Consequences of Increasing Sleep Among the Urban Poor. *The quarterly journal of economics*, 136(3), 1887–1941.
2. Berger, A. M., & Hobbs, B. B. (2006). Impact of shift work on the health and safety of nurses and patients. *Clinical journal of oncology nursing*, 10(4), 465–471.
3. Howard S. K. (2005). Sleep deprivation and physician performance: why should I care?. *Proceedings (Baylor University. Medical Center)*, 18(2), 108–113.
4. Li, H., Shao, Y., Xing, Z., Li, Y., Wang, S., Zhang, M., Ying, J., Shi, Y., & Sun, J. (2019). Napping on night-shifts among nursing staff: A mixed-methods systematic review. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 75(2), 291–312.
5. *Business Insider India*, Here's what NASA says is the perfect length for a power nap
6. *Doppel*, The science behind power naps

7. *Forbes India*, Why Indian companies need nap rooms at work